

A Note for the Staff of Bilateral and Multilateral Aid Agencies and of Northern NGOs on
Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA)

The purpose of this note is to outline some essentials of PRA, and to give guidance and advice to agency staff. The questions asked and answered are:

1. What is PRA?
2. Where is it to be found?
3. How has it been applied?
4. What are its dangers and shortcomings?
5. How can and should agency staff use it? Do's and don'ts
6. How can you follow up and find out more about PRA?

1. What is PRA?

PRA is the label which has been attached to a growing family of relaxed approaches and methods which enable local (rural or urban) people to make their own appraisal, analysis and plans, to share information, to act, and to monitor and evaluate actions and programmes.

PRA has evolved from and draws on many sources, including participatory action research, applied social anthropology, agroecosystem analysis, field research on farming systems, and rapid rural appraisal (RRA). RRA developed and spread in the late 1970s and 1980s as a reaction against the biases of rural development tourism (the brief rural visit of the urban-based professional) and the distortions, costs and inefficiencies of questionnaire surveys. RRA continues to be widely practised, but the word "rapid" has encouraged and allowed some sloppy and unselfcritical work by consultants and others. The first R of RRA is better "relaxed".

RRA and PRA share the principles of learning from and with people, directly, on site and face-to-face; learning rapidly and progressively; offsetting biases; optimising trade-offs between quantity, relevance, accuracy and timeliness of information; triangulating (crosschecking, judgemental sampling, etc); and seeking diversity.

The purpose of RRA is learning by outsiders. Many practitioners insist that PRA is different. Its aim is to facilitate appraisal and analysis by local (rural or urban) people themselves. We, outsiders, enable them to do many of the things we thought only we could do.

PRA has three pillars - methods, behaviour and attitudes, and sharing. Of these, behaviour and attitudes is the most important. PRA stresses: unlearning; self-critical awareness and responsibility; embracing error; "handing over the stick"; having confidence that "they can do it"; "being nice to people"; sitting down, listening, learning and not interrupting; patience and not rushing; and using one's own best judgement at all times.

PRA derives much of its strength from emphasising:

- * open-ended enquiry
- * visualisation (maps, matrices, models, diagrams by them)
- * comparisons
- * analysis by groups

RRA methods such as semi-structured interviewing are also used in PRA. In addition, much PRA facilitates the use of relatively new methods in a participatory mode such as:

- participatory mapping and modelling
- transect walks and observation
- seasonal calendars
- time lines, and trend and change diagramming
- matrix scoring and ranking
- wealth and wellbeing ranking and grouping
- institutional (Venn, chapati or tortilla) diagramming
- analytical diagramming

and others.

RRA and PRA are different. RRA is mainly extractive, eliciting information from villagers. It is a legitimate and often necessary activity for which PRA methods can also be used. But PRA as a family of approaches is meant to be empowering, enabling villagers to conduct their own analysis and to own the information generated.

2. Where is PRA to be found?

PRA means different things in different regions and different organisations. Here PRA refers to its truly participatory and empowering mode, not the use of PRA methods in an RRA process.

My information is inevitably incomplete, but I believe PRA in this sense is quite strongly established or rapidly evolving and spreading in various organisations and areas in:

Bangladesh, Botswana, Ethiopia, francophone West Africa, Ghana, India, Indonesia, Kenya, Namibia, Nepal, Nigeria, Pakistan, Philippines, South Africa, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Zambia and Zimbabwe

A lot is going on elsewhere, including in Latin America. Information on PRA in Latin America is available from James Blackburn, PRA, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE. Activity has taken place or is taking place in:

Benin, Bolivia, Brazil, Cambodia, Canada, Cap Verde, Chile, China, Colombia, Ecuador, the Gambia, Ghana, Germany, Laos, Lesotho, Madagascar, Malawi, Mexico, Morocco, Norway, Somaliland, Thailand, Zambia and the UK. (This listing is surely incomplete)

3. How has PRA been applied?

PRA has been used especially in the following fields. This listing is illustrative, and far from complete:

natural resources management:

- soil and water conservation (Kenya, India, South Africa, Vietnam)
- rural development forestry (India, Nepal, Tanzania, Uganda, Zimbabwe)
- fisheries (India, Philippines)
- participatory monitoring and evaluation (Kenya, India, Nepal, Bangladesh...)
- community-level planning (francophone West Africa, India, Kenya, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, Uganda, Vietnam, Zimbabwe...)

agriculture:

- agricultural research priorities (Botswana, India, Malawi, Zambia)
- crop-specific programmes (India, Nigeria, Pakistan)
- irrigation (India, Sri Lanka)

health and nutrition:

- health mapping (Bangladesh, India, Tanzania)
- monitoring and evaluation (Bangladesh, India, Nepal)
- water and sanitation planning and action (India, Kenya)

poverty programmes, food security, livelihoods:

- selection and deselection of poor people for programmes (Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka)
- identification of people's own criteria of wellbeing (India)
- livelihood analysis (India)

policy assessments:

- network of field researchers, for agricultural policy (Nepal)
- impact of structural adjustment (Zimbabwe)
- land tenure (Tanzania)
- participatory poverty assessments (Ghana, Kenya, Zambia..)

4. What are PRA's dangers and shortcomings?

The main dangers are bad PRA through:

faddism and the bandwagon effect: Organisations that say that PRA will be used at once in every project. Consultants who claim to be PRA trainers when they lack the experience, and have inappropriate behaviour and attitudes. PRA discredited through being done badly.

rushing: rapid and wrong again

routine ruts: standardisation, rigidity, set sequences, didactic teaching instead of experiential learning...

one-offs: "I've done a PRA", "They used PRA" and putting a tick against a box, without internalising and sustaining PRA as culture and process

conflict with organisational culture and procedures. PRA at community level implies changes in the facilitating organisations. Top-down pre-planning fits badly with participation. However, recognising the long-term implications for organisational change should not deter starting.

It does seem that any introduction of PRA should start slowly and proceed incrementally, recognising and exploring the needs for participatory management.

The main shortcomings are:

takes time and patience to establish: PRA may be rapid in a village, but it takes time and patience for many outsiders to learn to facilitate it

threats to power and self-esteem. Normal professionals, especially university statisticians, are threatened. Also, villagers usually make better facilitators than outsiders, including NGO staff, who may then feel threatened. Villagers are known to have written to an NGO "We are going to carry out a PRA. You do not need to come."

changing our behaviour and attitudes may be difficult It is commonly supposed that PRA methods cannot generate commensurable quantitative data. This has been challenged by experience, and PRA methods used well can replace questionnaires for many purposes.

5. How can and should aid agency staff use PRA? Do's and Don'ts

Do not:

- * feel you have to go with this as one of the latest fashions.
- * expect to be promoted because you support PRA.
- * expect PRA to work well where field staff gain big rents from corruption. They cannot be expected to take sharp drops in income for the sake of participation
- * expect PRA to be a big spender. Done well, it will slow and reduce disbursements, and spend less for more, at least in the short term
- * require consultants, researchers, government agencies, NGOs to "use PRA" and expect that to do the trick
- * sponsor or support routinised or classroom training, with fixed timetables, set sequences or rigid manuals
- * expect the normal staff of training institutes to be any good as trainer/facilitators
- * be taken in by consultants who use the label without the substance (Their trying to do this is not a rare occurrence)

Do:

- * consider the opportunity cost of recruiting scarce good trainer/facilitators. Is your project a good use of their time? Is anything they do likely to be sustainable in your project context? If yes, then
- * employ experienced trainer/facilitators from the South, both within their home countries and internationally. Support South-South sharing. A mixture of two or three trainers for the same field learning experience is often good. If a government agency is involved, do not think of training as a one-off exercise, but as part of a long process
- * try to ensure sustained high-level commitment to PRA

* ensure careful selection of participants in field learning. The best are usually self-selected - people who want to do PRA, and want and are able to help others to start

* start slow and small on a pilot basis, and provide consistent support for steady development and spread. Don't go fast, and don't give up easily. Hang in there. It may take time.

* arrange for lateral sharing and learning within and between countries, projects, organisations and departments

* involve villagers as consultants and trainer/facilitators as and when feasible.

* check trustworthiness. What is the process? Are there presentations by, with, to villagers? Do they share, check and amend? Do an outside team and local people triangulate, crosscheck?

* ask would-be trainer/facilitators five questions:

1. where would you wish the learning to take place? (If mainly classroom, reject. If opposed to sleeping in villages, reject. If mainly or entirely village or very rural or poor urban.. OK so far)

2. what do you consider most important in the learning experience? (If the teaching and correct learning of methods, reject. If behaviour, attitudes, do-it-yourself, being taught by villagers, learning to unlearn, learning not to interrupt, spending overnights in villages...OK so far)

3. what do you feel about others sharing in the training, as resource persons and co-trainers from other organisations, and as participants from other organisations? (If they want to keep it to themselves, reject, unless they are known to be highly experienced already and have a good reputation. If others are welcomed, OK so far)

4. what hours would you expect to work? (If 0900 to 1700, reject. If starting early, and all hours and into the night, OK so far)

5. what is your view of the participation of women and of the poorer people? (If considered secondary, reject. If given priority, OK)

Try to assess would-be trainers' own behaviour and attitudes. A good trainer is likely to be relaxed, sensitive, democratic, a good listener, with a sense of humour and fun, and blessed with physical stamina.

Do not recruit a. middle-aged men who wear suits and polished shoes in the field, b. fashionable radicals who spout about sustainability but are scared of sleeping in villages, or c. people who take themselves more seriously than their work.

6. How can you follow up and find out more about PRA?

A. trainer/facilitators

If you want to follow up, your major need is likely to be good trainer/facilitators. Their numbers are growing, but no one in the world knows who they all are. Probably demand will create its own supply, and some will now claim to be trainers who lack experience, and whose behaviour and attitudes are not right for the job. There will surely be some bad experiences and disillusion.

The largest numbers of experienced and capable trainer/facilitators currently are probably in India, Kenya, Zimbabwe and the UK (including nationals from the South in the UK). India is the single largest source. Indian trainers already have experience and an impressive record in SubSaharan African and Southeast Asia, as have Kenyan trainers in other SSA countries.

The national-level contacts listed below may be able to help. At IDS Sussex we have lists of trainers and can try to help with advice. The Sustainable Agriculture Programme at the International Institute for Environment and Development has the strongest UK-based training team and is also a source of information.

If you want contacts, phone IDS (44) 273 606261 (switchboard) or (44) 273 678490 (direct to Jenny Skepper-Stevenson) or fax to (44) 273 621202 (attn Jenny S-S)
You can also phone me at home on (44) 273 483038
(I don't mind calls from abroad at home as it impresses my family).

The IIED numbers are phone (44) 71 388 2117
fax (44) 71 388 2826

B. National and Subnational Networks

To the best of my knowledge, you can contact the following people who are coordinators or managers (all very much part-time) of national or sub-national PRA networks. It is likely that a number of Latin American countries will soon have network contacts. Please note that PRA means different things in different places.

Bangladesh: Dee Jupp (Dr)
SHOGORIP 5/4 Iqbal Road Block A Mohammedpur
Dhaka 1207 Tel: 880 2 325941/328731

Botswana S. Nkhori
Production Systems Programme
Department of Agricultural Research
P.O.Box 10, Mahalapye
Tel: 267 410677

Egypt Centre for Development Services
4 Ahmed Pasha St Citibank Building 6th Floor
Garden City Cairo Egypt
Tel: 202 354 6599 Fax: 202 354 8686

<u>Ethiopia</u>	Simon Adebo/Stephen Sandford Farm Africa PO Box 5746 Addis Ababa Ethiopia Fax: 251 1 652566
<u>Ghana</u>	Tony Dogbe Centre for Development of People PO Box 371 UST-Kumasi Ghana Tel: 233 51 4581 Fax: 233 51 4329
<u>India:</u>	Sam Joseph ActionAid 3 Resthouse Road, Bangalore 560 001 Tel: 91 80 586 682 Fax 91 80 586 284 Tamil Nadu Resource c/o SPEECH 14 Jeyaraja Illam Opp Kasirajan Hospital Tirupalai Madurai-625 014 South India Tel: 46370 Uttar Kanada Network P.D.Premkumar Western Ghat Environmental Project Sai Kiran Kench Road Karwar 581 301, India Tel: 26720
<u>Indonesia</u>	Mary Ann Kingsley World Education Jalan Tebet Dalam IV F/75 Jakarta 12810 Tel: 62 21 829 1026 Fax: 62 21 850 5440
<u>Kenya:</u>	Geoffrey Atieli ActionAid PO 42814 NRB Kenya
<u>Nepal</u>	Anupam Bhatia ICIMOD PO Box 3226 Kathmandu Tel: 977 1 525313 Fax: 977 1 524509
<u>Nigeria</u>	Oluwayomi_david Atte Department of Geography University of Ilorin Ilorin Tel: 234 31 221 552-5 Fax: 234 31 223 170

<u>Norway</u>	John Jones Centre for Partnership in Development PO Box 23 Vinderen 0319 Oslo e Tel: 47 22 451818 Fax: 47 22 451810
<u>Pakistan</u>	Richard Edwards Action Aid House 5 St.32,F8/1 Islamabad Tel: 92 51 858126 Fax: 92 51 851821
<u>South Africa</u>	Kamal Singh National Rural Development Forum PO Box 32434 Braamfontein 2017 South Africa Tel: 27 11 339 5412 7 Fax: 27 11 339 1440
	Tessa Cousins Association for Rural Advancement PO Box 2517 Pietermaritzburg 3200 Fax: 27 331 455106
<u>Sri Lanka</u>	Mallika Samaranayake Intercooperation 92/2 D S Senanayake Mawatha Columbo 8 Tel: 94 1 691215 Fax: 94 1 687467
<u>Uganda</u>	Dr John Aluma Head Forestry Dept Makerere University PO Box 7062 Kampala
<u>UK</u>	Sustainable Agriculture Programme IIED 3 Endsleigh St London WC1H 0DD Tel: 071 388 2117 Fax: 071 388 2826
<u>Vietnam</u>	Le Minit Tue/Bardolf Paul c/o Interforest AB PO Box 36 Hanoi Tel: 84 42 53236 Fax: 84 42 52542
<u>Zimbabwe</u>	Saiti Makuku Forestry Research Centre PO Box 595 HG Highlands Harare Tel: 263 4 26878 Fax: 263 4 795557

C. Reading.

For introductions to PRA:

James Mascarenhas "Participatory rural appraisal and participatory learning methods: recent experiences from MYRADA in South India/2, Forests, Trees and People Newsletter 15/16 February 1992 pp 10-17 (practical and to the point) (Probably free, from

Forests, Trees and People Newsletter, IRDC, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Box 7005, S-750 07 Uppsala, Sweden)

Robert Chambers Rural Appraisal: Rapid, Relaxed and Participatory. Discussion Paper 311, IDS, University of Sussex, October 1992 (a long-winded overview, trying to cover everything) (available from Publications Office, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE; cost £2.95 + 45p postage and packing) (This has been expanded and updated as three articles in World Development, in three successive issues in late 1994).

"Relaxed and Participatory Rural Appraisal: Notes on Practical Approaches and Methods" (periodically updated, about 12 pages) available from Jenny Skepper-Stevenson, IDS, University of Sussex, Brighton BN1 9RE.

The best way to keep up is to receive RRA Notes (1-20 continuing) from the Sustainable Agriculture Programme, International Institute for Environment and Development, 3 Endsleigh Street, London WC1H 0DD. This is free to individuals and organisations in the South. I recommend requesting selected backcopies (13 is a bumper issue reporting on Indian experience, 15 is on wealth and wellbeing ranking, 16 is on health, 19 on training and 20 on livestock). Up to two back copies are available free of charge to people in the south only. A future issue will be on urban applications.

IIED is setting up a resource centre for participatory learning and action which will have the most complete collection of materials in the UK. This is expected to be operational early in 1995.

While funds remain, IDS will continue to have a PRA reading room to which you are welcome.

For detailed information on sources, consult the abstracts available from IDS. These number over 1,000 references. The abstracts are available free from PRA, IDS until the end of November 1994, and thereafter for a charge from Publications at IDS. The topics for which separate sets of abstracts are available are:

- * agriculture
- * Northern country applications
- * food security
- * forestry
- * gender
- * health
- * irrigation
- * livestock
- * methods
- * participatory monitoring and evaluation
- * soil and water conservation and watershed management
- * training and education
- * urban applications
- * videos on PRA (including how to obtain them)

Each topic has an overview which gives 2- 4 key sources.

These abstracts will be available on Internet, and perhaps also on E-mail.

D. Personal Experience. For people working in international organisations it is quite difficult to gain good personal experience in the field in the South. I do recommend it, all

the same. My priority is promoting and supporting South-South sharing, so please do not ask me to arrange this for you. If you are able to join a field experience, please remember that the presence of someone from the North alters the dynamics and expectations of local people. So be open about who you are, and why you are there, and then try to be as insignificant as you can make yourself. Let me also urge you a. to stay for the full period and take part fully as a participant, b. to stay in the same place as everyone else, and c. to enjoy it!

17 October 1994
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